

Montgomery County school board not likely to promote from within for next superintendent

Weast isn't interested in Nevada job, chief of staff says

by Andrew Ujifusa | Staff Writer

The next superintendent of Montgomery County Public Schools probably will not come from within, the Board of Education's president said a few days after the school system officially began its search.

On Thursday, the school board unanimously approved a competitive bidding process that will select a firm to aid local officials in the search for Superintendent of Schools Jerry D. Weast's replacement. A request for proposals from search firms was scheduled to be issued Monday.

The resolution approved by the board states the search firm will be selected in November or December, followed by the position being advertised in The Washington Post, The New York Times and Bethesda-based Education Week in December and January, as well as on various websites and through school system social media and news releases.

The search firm also will solicit potential candidates, and community input on the next superintendent will be sought in January.

Following board consultations and interviews, the next superintendent is scheduled to be selected by the school board in May. Weast, who announced in August he would retire from the county school system where he has been superintendent since 1999, leaves his position June 30.

Board of Education President Patricia B. O'Neill (Dist. 3) of Bethesda said the board probably will not promote a current school system employee and stressed the importance of looking beyond Maryland for the right candidate. This, in turn, makes using a good national search firm with connections in education circles important, O'Neill said, rather than a local educational organization that could conduct the search for free.

"You want to recruit the most high-caliber, effective professional," O'Neill said. "I'm skeptical that the caliber of superintendent that we want to attract will just respond to an ad in [Education Week] or The Washington Post."

State law requires that, at minimum, a new superintendent must have at least three years of successful teaching experience and two years of administrative or supervisory experience, in addition to having a master's degree from an institute of higher education, although waivers can be obtained for specific requirements. The school board indicated it

preferred candidates who have been superintendents of a school system with more than 20,000 students, although O'Neill said it would not rule out other candidates.

Although board members noted the importance of gathering input from the community, they also touched on the need for confidentiality regarding the candidates, because some might be working for other school districts.

Kristin Tribble, president of the Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations, said her group and others need to be in the room when crucial decisions are made throughout the process, although not when board members are voting. Community members involved in the process, meanwhile, should accept confidentiality agreements about who is under consideration, Tribble said.

"I think the Board of Education needs to open itself up to input throughout the entire process," she said.

Both O'Neill and board member Michael A. Durso (Dist. 5) of Silver Spring said it was too early to describe how various community groups should be represented in the selection process, but both indicated Weast should not have a role in choosing his successor.

"I know when I left as principal, I did not feel as if it were appropriate for me to be involved in that process," said Durso, who retired as Springbrook High School's principal in 2009.

Asked about the possibility of District of Columbia Public Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee for Weast's job, O'Neill and Durso declined to rule her in or out, but both highlighted what they called her rocky relationship with various groups in the District.

Speculation has been churning about Rhee's future following the defeat of Washington, D.C., Mayor Adrian Fenty in the Sept. 14 Democratic primary by Vincent Gray, but Rhee has not officially indicated whether or not she plans to resign.

"I think in a nutshell, her style may have overshadowed whatever accomplishments that people think she's made," Durso said.

Weast's name already has cropped up in education news on the other side of the country. An article in Thursday's Las Vegas Review-Journal linked Weast to the Clark County Public Schools superintendent's position, although the story did report that a spokesman for Weast denied he was a candidate for the position. Las Vegas is the seat of Clark County. On Thursday, Weast's chief of staff Brian K. Edwards said Weast had not applied for the Clark County position and was not interested in it.